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Smith takes over as new state museum director

PIERRE, S.D. -- Jay Smith took over Jan. 9 as the new director of the Museum of the South Dakota State Historical Society at the Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre.

Most recently, Smith was an executive consultant for Fort Stanton, Inc. in New Mexico. Prior to that, he was the interim director at the Silver City Museum and director of the Hubbard Museum of the American West, both also in New Mexico. His previous experience was mostly in Kansas. He is the immediate past president of the Mountain-Plains Museum Association.

Smith, 46, replaces Helen B Louise, who took a similar position in Wyoming last year. Smith said he's looking forward to his new job.

"I am excited about the opportunity and pleased to be joining the South Dakota State Historical Society team," he said. "I was impressed with the facilities, resources, and personnel during the interview process, and I am excited about our future."

Jay D. Vogt, director of the State Historical Society, said he's pleased to have Smith on board at the Cultural Heritage Center.

"Jay brings real-world museum experience to the State Historical Society team and a knowledge and love of the American West," Vogt said. "He will be an excellent addition to our management group."

The museum is one of four State Historical Society programs located in the Cultural Heritage Center, along with the archives, historic preservation, and research and publishing. The society's nonprofit financial partner, the South Dakota Historical Society Foundation (formerly the Heritage Fund) is also housed in the center. The society's archaeology program is located in Rapid City.

Vogt said that Smith has the ability to increase the museum's outreach efforts.

"As the state museum, we are expected to provide leadership in the field of history, and Jay has the personality and possesses an understanding of museum operations to aid local historical societies and museums as requested," Vogt said. "Further, Jay has the ability to continue our award-winning museum program through exhibitions in the Cultural Heritage Center, and our education kit and traveling exhibit programs."

Smith said he's impressed with what the museum is already doing in outreach, and he's looking to expand that.

"I really like the Field Service program, wherein the museum staff shares knowledge and expertise with other museums around the state of South Dakota through both site visits and correspondence," he said. "I think it is very important for the state museum to offer and provide service and value to the community of museums in the state, which in turn helps to attract more local support and visitation to those facilities. We are all in the business of providing the best visitor experience possible, and I think sharing our collective knowledge is a positive step toward serving the citizens of South Dakota, as well as our visitors."

Smith noted that the museum's outreach efforts include the social media and internet.

"We have a Facebook page that regularly spotlights what is happening at the museum and a website that has a great deal of information about our fantastic collection and educational opportunities," he said. "Our social media efforts are quite professional, enjoyable and educational."

Find the museum online at history.sd.gov/museum. From here you will find links to the Facebook, Flickr, and YouTube pages.

Smith encouraged people with questions about the museum to contact him at jay.smith@state.sd.us or (605) 773-3798.

"I look forward to working with the people of South Dakota as we continue to collect, preserve and interpret the history of this remarkable state," he said.

Cutline information: Jay Smith, new director of the state museum at the Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre, takes a "ride" on the combine in the "Our South Dakota" exhibit. (Photo courtesy South Dakota State Historical Society)

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The South Dakota State Historical Society is a division of the Department of Tourism. The Department of Tourism is comprised of Tourism, the South Dakota Arts Council, and the State Historical Society. The Department is led by Secretary James D. Hagen. The State Historical Society is headquartered at the South Dakota Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre. The center houses the society's world-class museum, the archives, and the historic preservation, publishing and administrative/development offices. Call (605) 773-3458 or visit www.history.sd.gov for more information. The society also has an archaeology office in Rapid City; call (605) 394-1936 for more information.